

# CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: PREVENTION, DETECTION, REPORTING



Division of Child Day Care Licensing

3. **Children know the difference between what they do and what they read about. Check with some of the other parents.**

4. What if your children come home with stories about people taking pictures of them and the care staff says that's true and shows you pictures of classroom activities, but you don't feel that's the whole store? **Ask other parents about what their children are saying.**

- Believe the child. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.
- Commend the child for telling you about the experience.
- Convey your support for the child. A child's greatest fear is that he or she is at fault and responsible for the incident. Alleviating this self blame is of paramount importance.
- Temper your own reaction, recognizing that your perspective and acceptance are critical signals to the child. Your greatest challenge may be to not convey your own reaction to the abuse.
- Find a specialized agency that evaluates sexual abuse victims - a hospital or a child welfare agency or a community mental health therapy group. Keep asking until you find a group or an individual with appropriate expertise.
- Search for a physician with the experience and training to detect and recognize sexual abuse when you seek a special medical examination for your child. Community sexual abuse treatment programs, local community health departments, children's hospitals and medical societies may be sources for referrals.
- Talk with other parents to ascertain whether there are unusual behavior or physical symptoms in their children.

- Report it. Remember that taking action is critical because if nothing is done, other children will continue to be at risk. If you know or suspect that abuse has occurred, you should call or write and report it to your local Department of Human Services (DHS). If you feel the problem requires immediate attention during a time when the local DHS office is not open, you should call the 24-hour number for children's protective services included in the phone directory listing for your county Department of Human Services.

- Finally, if your child should be sexually abused, do not blame yourself or the child. Sexual abuse is a fact in our society. The vast majority of abuse occurs in situations where the child knows and trusts the adult. Sometimes people who molest children do find work through employment and community activities which give them access to children.

Do your homework well, but remember a community and nation consciousness is needed before we can stamp out sexual molestation in our society.

Department of Human Services (DHS) will not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, sex, religion, age, national origin, color, height, weight, marital status, political beliefs or disability. If you need help with reading, writing, hearing, etc., under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you are invited to make your needs known to a DHS office in your area.

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*The vast majority of people hired to care for children do provide good, safe, nurturing care. Sexual abuse of children is rare. But it does occur, and as a parent, you need to be aware of that.*

*What sometimes does occur is sexual exploration between children of similar ages. It is important for parents to sort out whether an incident is abusive or whether two children are just trying to see the differences between the sexes.*

## BEST WAYS TO PREVENT SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN:

The most important strategy for preventing sexual abuse of children is good communication between children and parents. This is challenging for any parent; it can be especially difficult for working parents and parents of young children. Some pointers:

- Talk to your child every day and take time to really listen and observe. Learn as many details as you can about your child's experiences and feelings during the day. Encourage the child to share concerns and problems with you.
- Listen to what your child is saying and to what they are **not** saying. Statements like "I don't want Grandpa to come for dinner," or "The babysitter broke my bottom," should be discussed further.
- Explain that some adults might even threaten children by saying that their parents may be hurt or killed if the child ever shares a secret.

Emphasize that an adult who says something like this is doing something that is wrong.

- Tell your child that adults whom they know, trust and love, and adults who are in positions of authority (like a babysitter, an uncle, a teacher or even a policeman) might say or do these wrong thing. **Try not to scare your child.** Emphasize that the vast majority of grownups never do these things and that most adults are deeply concerned about protecting children from harm.
- Prepare your child for child care by talking about rules they are to obey covering such things as safety, meals and bedtime. Be sure that children know they should not obey certain orders, such as one to keep a secret from parents.
- Explain clearly and emphatically to your child that:
  1. The child's body belongs to him or her alone.
  2. The child has a right to say NO to anyone who tries to touch them. It is necessary to explain the difference between an inappropriate touch and appropriate touch that hurts, such as a exam by a doctor or a shot from a nurse.
  3. If someone does try to touch the child, the child **must tell you, the parent, about it.**

## WARNING SIGNS:

Children who may be too frightened to talk about sexual molestation may exhibit a variety of physical and behavioral signals. Any or several of these signs may be significant. Parents should assume responsibility for noticing such symptoms, which include:

- Extreme changes in behavior such as loss of appetite.

- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns and fear of the dark.
- Regression to more infantile behavior such as bedwetting, thumb sucking or excessive crying.
- Torn or stained underclothing.
- Vaginal or rectal bleeding, pain, itching, swollen genitals, or vaginal discharges.
- Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual matters, expressing affection in ways inappropriate for a child of that age.
- Fear of a person or an intense dislike to being left somewhere or with someone.
- Unusually aggressive or disruptive behavior, withdrawal, running away or delinquent behavior, or failing in school.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED:

- Immediately act on any hunches you have. Talk to other parents. Find out if they're having similar problems or concerns. Do not be swayed by easy answers or dismissal by any of the child care staff until you are satisfied with the answers. Some examples:

1. What if your child came home with someone else's underwear on and the care staff says he messed his pants and they borrowed someone else's second pair?

**Call the parents of the other child.**

2. What if your child comes home with a story about riding to the airport in a van and care staff says he or she is confused, they read a story about it?